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SOURCE Le Courrier d'Afrique.

SURVEY OF INDUSTRY IN FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA

The following information was taken from articles in the 17 and 18 November issues of Le Courrier d'Afrique, a Leopoldville daily newspaper. The industrial expansion taking place in French Equatorial Africa is discussed.

The industrialization of French Equatorial Africa is gaining momentum as a result of the application of the Ten-Year Plan. During the period 1939-1945, the only important industry was forestry. Since that time, industrial activity has expanded considerably and will increase still more with the inauguration, in 1953, of two new hydroelectric plants, one on the Djoue River, near Brazzaville, and the other at Bouali, near Bangui.

A brief survey of industrial progress in French Equatorial Africa is given below.

Forest Industries

Although French Equatorial Africa has more than 100 million hectares of forests, the most important growths are in Gabon. The latter has 22 lumber mills, of which the Compagnie Francaise du Gabon (French Company of Gabon), located at Port Gentil, is one of the best equipped. The total annual productive capacity of the Gabon mills is 35,000 cubic meters of sawn timber, 50,000 meters of veneers, and 40,000 cubic meters of plywood.

The Middle Congo produces 55,000 cubic meters annually, consisting principally of sawn lumber. Several thousand cubic meters of veneers and plywoods are also produced at Pointe Noire. Ubangi-Shari has 12 sawmills with a total annual productive capacity of 35,000 cubic meters of sawn timber, enough to meet the needs of Chad and Ubangi-Shari.

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At present, lumber consumption in French Equatorial Africa is not great, being limited chiefly to the construction of houses and the manufacture of furniture. However, plans are now under way for the establishment of plants for the production of wood pulp, cellulose, wallboard, and wood alcohol.

Oleaginous Products

The oil palm, principal oleaginous plant in the region, furnishes about 15,000 tons of oil per year for native consumption. In addition, exports total annually 2,500 tons valued at 130 million CFA francs. Processing is done both by small rudimentary installation and by large modern enterprises located for the most part in the Middle Congo and Ubangi-Shari. The CFHBC (Compagnie Francaise du Haut et du Bas Congo, French Company of the Upper and Lower Congo) leads in production, with 3,200 tons of palm oil per year. It has 17 steam-operated plants equipped with screw presses and 41 pressing stations. These plants are located in the Middle Congo, the principal one being at Etoumbi.

In Ubangi-Shari the main oil-processing plants are located at Bouchia, Boussimba, Bagandou, and Zomia. ETINAF (Etablissements Industriels Africains, African Industrial Enterprises) recently acquired modern equipment that will produce 500 tons annually, and another new plant at N'Zalo will have an annual capacity of 400 tons of oil. IRHO (Institut de Recherches pour les Huiles et Oleagineux, Research Institute for Oils and Oleaginous Products) has a plant now under construction at Sibiti, which will produce 600 tons per year.

Some oleaginous plants found in French Equatorial Africa are not yet utilized by the vegetable oil industry. Peanuts are consumed, for the most part, without processing. However, SIAN (Societe Industrielle et Agricole du Niari, Agricultural and Industrial Company of Niari) has an installation at Loudima, in the Middle Congo, that can process 700 tons of peanuts per year. Additional processing plants will soon begin operating in Ubangi-Shari, mainly at Bambari, where one plant already processes more than 100 tons per year.

In addition to peanuts, these plants will also process cottonseed, which has not, so far, been utilized. COTONFRAN (Compagnie Cotonniere Equatoriale Francaise, French Equatorial Cotton Company) is studying the installation of a plant at Moundou, in Chad, which will be able to produce 600 tons of oil in 1954. At present, a plant at Bangui produces 610 tons of sesame oil annually for local consumption.

Mining

Mining in French Equatorial Africa has been limited, so far, to diamonds and gold. The constantly increasing production of diamonds, which exceeded 150,000 carats in 1952, promises to reach 400,000 carats by 1956. Gold production, which amounted to 1,643 kilograms in 1951, is decreasing because at the present low prices, only the high-grade ore deposits can be profitably exploited.

Other minerals extracted include small quantities of natron near Lake Chad and bitumen in Gabon. In addition, zinc and lead are being extracted in the Niari River Valley by the Societe Miniere du Congo (Congo Mining Company). In 1951, production of lead ore amounted to 4,000 tons, while zinc ore production totaled 6,000 tons. Because of insufficient electric power in the area, this ore is not processed.

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The mining industry in French Equatorial Africa is now studying the exploitation of new mineral deposits, such as manganese at Franceville, where about 50 million CFA francs have been invested in the development; copper in the Middle Congo; tin in Chad; phosphate fertilizers at Mayombe; and petroleum in Gabon.

Fishing

LIFA (L'Industrie de Pêche en Afrique, Afrique, African Fish Industry) and SAFAC (Société Anonyme de Pêche, d'Armement et de Conservation, Fishing and Fishing Supplies Company), two fishing companies located at Pointe Noire, together operate five trawlers. They have cold-storage warehouses where the fish are stored until sold locally or shipped by refrigerated cars to Dolisie and Brazzaville, or by air to other markets.

If a company were set up to engage in the drying, salting, or smoking of fish, it would be assured of a very large market in French Equatorial Africa, as well as in the French Cameroons and the Belgian Congo. The requirements of French Equatorial Africa are indicated by the 1951 imports of dried, salted, or smoked fish, which exceeded 4,500 tons.

SOPECOBA (Société des Pêcheries Coloniales à La Baleine, Colonial Whale Fisheries Company) has a modern whaling vessel, the Anglonorse, plus an establishment at Port Gentil. In 1951, this company produced 7,100 tons of whale oil and 1,600 tons of whale meal. Another company, SOPECOREC [not further identified], was established in 1951 at Port Gentil. It produced 38 tons of shark liver oil during 1951 for export to the US. The two trawlers operated by this company also bring in other types of fish, which are sold in Gabon or shipped to the French Cameroons and Nigeria.

Livestock

The development of stock farming in Chad is reflected in the figures for 1951: 3 million cattle, 2 million sheep, and 1.5 million goats. Given the scarcity of meat in the adjacent areas, this growth in Chad stock raising may lead to the development of meat-products industries.

The slaughter house operated by TREC [not further identified] and SICA [not further identified] in Abeche, have become important meat export centers. From October 1951 to January 1952, TREC shipped 296 tons of meat to Douala, Brazzaville, Yaounde, Spanish Guinea, Libreville, and Pointe Noire, while SICA shipped 230 tons of meat during the same period to Brazzaville, Leopoldville, Pointe Noire, and Bangui. A meat-canning plant and a soap factory will soon be constructed at Abeche. At present, animal hides are merely given an arsenic treatment before export, while by-products such as horns are discarded. An industry utilizing these by-products could be established successfully in Chad.

There are three tanneries in French Equatorial Africa, with an annual productive capacity of 500 tons, which could probably be increased to 400 tons of cow hides and 200 tons of lighter skins. A shoe factory located at Brazzaville can produce about 5,000 pairs of civilian shoes and 8,000 pairs of military shoes per month.

Textiles

The cotton industry in French Equatorial Africa is represented by four large companies: COTONFRAN, COTONAF (Société Française de Cotons Africains, French Company for African Cotton), COMOUNA (Compagnie Commerciale et Cottonnière de l'Ouhamenana, Commercial Cotton Company of Ouhamenana), and

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COTOUBANGUI (Compagnie Cottonniere du Haut Oubangui, Upper Ubangui Cotton Company). The four companies have a total of 43 steam-operated plants for ginning and baling cotton.

After implementation of their modernization plans, the four companies will be able to handle the entire cotton output of Chad and Ubangi-Shari, amounting to about 100,000 tons per year.

At Brazzaville, a spinning and weaving mill with 6,400 spindles and 110 looms has been set up by the Winter-Savana Company and SOCOFRA (Societe Commerciale Francaise, French Commercial Company). At present, the mill is being operated by the Societe Tefraco (Tefraco Company), with 2,000 spindles and 60 looms in use. Its current monthly production of 50,000 linear meters of plain drill cloth will be increased to 100,000 meters by the end of 1952. Later, with the introduction of three working shifts, monthly production will be increased to 300,000 meters.

At Bouali, in Ubangi-Shari, a large textile mill is now be constructed. The ICOT (Societe d'Industrie Cottonniere de l'Oubangui et du Tchad, Industrial Cotton Company of Ubangi-Shari and Chad) has planned the establishment of a spinning mill that will be operating by the end of 1953.

Production goals, based on the operation of 400 looms and 12,000 spindles, are as follows: in 1954, 300,000 linear meters of cloth, using 180 tons of raw cotton; and in 1962, 5,600,000 linear meters of cloth, using 1,000 tons of raw cotton. Pending completion of the hydroelectric power plant at Bouali, the mill will generate electric power with a thermal power plant.

The manufacture of cotton goods in French Equatorial Africa offers great possibilities, since their imports in 1951 amounted to 1,300,000,000 CFA francs. This sum represents 2,000 tons of cotton yard goods and 672 tons of cotton blankets.

Sisal, which is cultivated chiefly in Ubangi-Shari, is processed by the Gilliaux Group, which operates eight shredding mills. A spinning mill is now being set up at Kandjia. Commercial production in 1951 exceeded 2,000 tons, of which 65 percent was exported and the rest was made into string, rope, and cloth for the local market. Two mills which are now being installed in the producing areas will have a total potential capacity of 1,500 tons per year.

Urena lobata and punga are cultivated in the Middle Congo. SOFICO (Societe des Fibres Coloniales, Colonial Fiber Company) operates a retting plant near Dolisie, with a production capacity of 1,200 tons per year. SOFICO also plans the construction of a sack factory to meet local market requirements, which amount to about 500 tons annually.

Soaps and Tallow

In 1949, there were 13 soap factories in the country, furnishing about 6,000 tons of low-quality soap for local consumption. Considerable modernization has been accomplished in the meantime, and now French Equatorial Africa annually produces more than 2,000 tons of soap equal in quality to that manufactured in Marseilles, France. Imports, however, are still necessary. ETINAF is setting up a modern plant, provided with a glycerin-extracting machine. This plant will produce more than 1,200 tons in 1953.

Rice and Manioc

In Chad, there are two rice mills at Lai, with a total annual production of 3,500 tons. Other small rice mills may be set up in this territory, where rice production is increasing. There is an assured outlet in Chad, Ubangi-Shari, and the French Cameroons.

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Manioc is processed by a mill at Kaye, in the Middle Congo, with a production capacity of 600 tons of flour and 400 tons of tapioca.

Breweries

In early 1952, a brewery was established at Brazzaville by the same company that operates the Leopoldville brewery. Rice is used in making the mash. The present production of 3,000 hectoliters per month will be increased to 10,000 hectoliters by the end of 1953.

The Societe Motte Cordonnier (Motte Cordonnier Company) has undertaken the establishment of a brewery at Bangui which will have a production capacity of 10,000 hectoliters per year.

Tobacco

All tobacco grown in French Equatorial Africa is processed by SIAT (Societe Industrielle et Agricole du Tabac Colonial, Industrial and Agricultural Company for Colonial Tobacco), which is located in Brazzaville. This company processes more than 250 tons of tobacco annually and has a monthly output of one million packs of cigarettes.

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